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SNIE 84-55
11 January 1955

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SPECIAL

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 84-55

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT REMON OF PANAMA

RECORD COPY

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the Intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 11 January 1955. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC and the Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE 22-6-4 REVIEWER: 372044

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CONSEQUENCES OF THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT REMON OF PANAMA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable short-term consequences of the assassination of President Remon with reference to: (a) internal stability of Panama and the Caribbean area; (b) international relations in the Caribbean area; and (c) relations between Panama and the United States.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Remon's death will not significantly affect the fundamental relationship between the United States and Republic of Panama, but will almost certainly set off troublesome developments both in Panama and in the Caribbean area.

2. Guizado, Remon's successor as President of Panama, lacks Remon's political stature. His regime will probably be marked by a struggle for political leadership, with a consequent revival of the family and factional politics traditional in Panama.

3. The rulers of the Caribbean republics, increasingly concerned for their personal safety, will probably adopt more repressive measures against their political opponents. Somoza (Nicaragua) and Pérez Jiménez (Venezuela) will probably intensify their clandestine efforts to eliminate Figueres (Costa Rica), whom they regard as the focal point of revolutionary leftist movements in the area. They are not likely to be deterred by Figueres' appeal to the Organization of American states, but will take care to avoid the appearance of direct intervention. Figueres will continue to press the United States for protection against external threats to his security.

DISCUSSION

4. The identity and motivation of the assassins of President José Antonio Remon have not as yet been established. The assassination could have been politically motivated, but it could as well have been related to Remon's private life, or to a behind-the-scenes struggle for the control of lucrative business operations. In any case, the assassination will almost certainly have troublesome domestic and regional repercussions.

5. The Panamanian authorities have apparently acted on the suspicion that Remon's assassination may have been instigated by Arnulfo Arias, whom Remon deposed from the presidency of Panama in 1951, and the fear that, in any case, Arias might become a rallying point for revolutionary action. They have arrested Arias; most of the others arrested to date have had some connection with him. Arias is a mercurial character who has been

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implicated in almost every plot against the government in recent times. There was, however, no apparent attempt at a coup in connection with the assassination, nor has there yet appeared any tangible evidence implicating Arias in the crime. His arrest, therefore, appears to be entirely presumptive and preventive.

6. The assassination will adversely affect political stability in Panama. Remon was the country's dominant political figure. Although he achieved power through control of the National Police (now called the National Guard), he later, as constitutionally elected president, succeeded in building up a large popular following. Throughout his administration he paid greater attention to democratic forms than had any of his recent predecessors. He instituted a social and economic program directed toward all sectors of the population. The treaty he negotiated with the US —as yet unsigned — brings important concessions to Panama and had already enhanced Remon's popular position.

7. José Ramón Guizado, the first vice president, has been sworn in as Remon's successor. The National Guard, the only armed force of Panama, has decided to support him, for the time being at least. However, Col. Vallarino, commandant of the Guard, and Lt. Col. Flores, deputy commandant, do not trust Guizado. They appearently fear that he might later connive with Arnulfista elements to break their control of the Guard and possibly to restore Arnulfo Arias to the presidency. If convinced that such a coup was in the making, they would displace Guizado, probably in favor of Ricardo Arias, the second vice president, whom they regard as their friend.

8. Guizado lacks the political stature of Remon and may not be able to control the situation throughout his term in office (until October 1956). The political coalition which Remon had formed is likely to dissolve into personal factions contending for leadership, with a consequent revival of traditional family and factional politics. As in the past, the stability of the government will depend on the continued support of the National Guard and control of the Guard will be the key to the political situation. Within the Guard, differences may develop between Vallarino and Flores. Of the two, Flores is the stronger character, with probably greater command over the loyalty of the rank and file. However, the fact that Flores is a Negro is a personal political handicap which would probably confine him, at least initially, to the role of kingmaker.

9. Although Panamanian politics may thus become chaotic, it is not likely that any strongly anti-US group could gain sufficient strength to seize control of the country. The Communists are not strong numerically and have been closely circumscribed by measures taken against them during the Remon administration.

10. The assassination of Remon, following the attempt (in April 1954) to assassinate President Somoza of Nicaragua, will cause the more authoritarian rulers in the Caribbean area (Somoza, Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Batista in Cuba, and Castillo Armas in Guatemala) to be increasingly concerned regarding their personal safety. They may be expected to take action designed to tighten their personal control over their respective countries and to adopt even more repressive measures against opposition elements than those currently in effect.

11. The assassination of Remon will heighten existing international tensions in the Caribbean area. It coincides with an increasing volume of reports of an impending revolutionary attempt against the Figueres regime in Costa Rica, with Venezuelan and Nicaraguan support. Remon was generally identified with the authoritarian alignment (Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic), particularly with Venezuela. Somoza and Pérez Jiménez will make every effort to link the murder of Remon with the attempt to assassinate Somoza and to attribute it to an "international leftist conspiracy" involving President Figueres of Costa Rica and exiles from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Reports to this effect from Venezuelan and Nicaraguan sources have already begun to circulate.

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12. Somoza and Pérez Jiménez will probably redouble their efforts to convince the United States that an "international leftist conspiracy" threatens stability and security in the Caribbean, and that the murder of Remon presages an intensification of subversive activity throughout the area. They will direct such charges primarily against Figueres, whom they dislike because of his assistance to and friendship for exiled groups and his bitter condemnation of dictatorships, notably those of Nicaragua and Venezuela, and whom they denounce as a Communist.

13. Somoza and Pérez Jiménez will probably argue that US "restraints" on them have prevented them from taking effective action against subversive elements in the region. They will cite the murder of Remon as a new argument for a re-examination of this US attitude. They will in effect demand that the US either take such action in the area as would assure their security or give them a free hand in dealing with those persons and movements that, in their opinion, threaten regional stability.

14. Hitherto, the assassination of chiefs of state has not been an accepted mode of Caribbean political warfare. If Remon's assassination was in fact the result of an international conspiracy (which has not been established), this, in conjunction with the attempt to assassinate Somoza, might indicate that opposition elements in the Caribbean have adopted terrorism as a method of political action. Should such a pattern be established, the Caribbean governments would respond with commensurate violence and a marked deterioration in Caribbean political practices would have set in.

15. The events in Panama are likely to complicate the already difficult position of José Figueres in Costa Rica. He has formally demanded action by the Organization of American States to restrain Nicaragua. At its meeting on 10 January the Council of the OAS postponed action until the 12th, but called on both Costa Rica and Nicaragua to avoid in the meantime any step which would aggravate the existing situation. Nevertheless, Somoza and Pérez Jiménez are likely to intensify their efforts to eliminate Figueres by providing further clandestine support to Costa Rican exiles and by encouraging opposition elements within Costa Rica, although they will take care to avoid the appearance of direct intervention. Figueres will continue to press for US protection against external threats to his security.

16. It is not likely that relations between the United States and Panama will be significantly affected by the assassination of Remon. The still unsigned treaty may become an issue in Panamanian politics, but its eventual acceptance by Panama will not be seriously endangered. It is likely also that the uncertain political situation created by the murder of Remon will again inject local politics into relations between the US and Panama. There is small chance, however, that these irritants will importantly affect US security interests in Panama.

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